My Incredible Discovery of Islam

When someone asked me recently how I came into the fold of Islam, I was taken aback and a bit surprised. For I have never thought of my coming into Islam as having one critical turning point. When did I first question Catholicism? When did I first want to become a Muslim? The answers to these questions and many others require more thought than I could have ever imagined. To really anwer these questions I have to start at the very beginning so that you understand the point to where I got in my life that led me to finally accept the truth of Islam. I became a Muslim at the age of 67, and I thank God that He has blessed me to become a believer in Islam. ***"Those whom Allah (in His plan) wills to guide,- He opens their breast to Islam; those whom He wills to leave straying,- He makes their breast close and constricted, as if they had to climb up to the skies: thus does Allah (heap) the penalty on those who refuse to believe."*** (Quran 6: 125)

I was raised in a strict Roman Catholic home, the middle daughter of three children. My father worked hard and long every day. He would leave early in the morning each day and would return late at night. All of this so that my mother could stay home and take care of my sisters and me. One very sad and unfortunate day my mother told us that my father had been in a car accident. He passed away suddenly and our whole world turned upside down. With all the changes that were taking place, my mother told us that she would now have to go back to work. My mother, who had once been a nurse, was now forced to work to support us. She found a job in the local hospital, many times working two shifts. But with this newfound responsibility, my mother was no longer able to oversee our upbringing. And although she sent us to Catholic school, her job kept her from keeping a watchful eye on her daughters.

So, with much time to pass and spend, I found myself spending time with my friends at the local cafes. It was there that I met a very nice Musliman man who later became my husband. My mother did not know that I was spending time with this man. In fact, when I told her that I was in love and wanted to get married, she warned that we were from different backgrounds and that we would eventually have problems. She stated that if there were ever children in our future, problems over religion would undoubtedly develop. At twenty years old, I could not imagine that we would have any problems in our marriage. I was so in love and felt so happy that someone would be taking care of me. My husband was not a very religious man at that time, and deep down I felt that I would be able to get him to convert to Catholicism. As for us not having the same ethnic background, I considered myself more open-minded and was excited to be embracing a new culture.

Everything seemed to be going along so perfectly for the next several years. We were happy and not once did culture or religion ever cause us any problems. God blessed us with a beautiful son and then several years later with a beautiful daughter. Still, we went along with our lives and I even began taking my children to church with me. My husband never prevented me from attending weekly Sunday mass. However, after a few times of my taking our children to church, that is when he spoke to me about his not wanting the children to attend church. Frankly, I was angry and upset. "But why not," I objected. "Any religion is better than none," I argued. I really could not understand the harm in taking them to church. Up until this point, we had never even discussed religion. In fact, I had never even questioned that there could even be a different

religion than Catholicism. I was born a Catholic and thought that Catholicism was the right religion. For explanations that I can't even put a finger on, it seemed like from this day on, so many problems were now evident. We argued all the time— about everything and everyone. Now, little things became a big deal. Religion became an arguing point between us. The differences in our cultures became something to argue about. We argued about in-laws and most unfortunately, we argued on the upbringing of our children. Everything that my mother warned us about was now coming true.

The only peace and harmony that was now between us was the wisdom, sincerity, concern and love my husband's father, my father-in-law, had for our marriage. My father-in-law loved his son and grandchildren, yet also genuinely loved me as a daughter. He was a very religious and devout Muslim and was a very wise man. At that time, because I was not surrounded with Islam, my father-in law was the first introduction into Islam I had. He prayed every prayer, fasted during the month of Ramadan, and was very generous to the poor. I could feel his connection to God. In fact, my father-in-law was so kind to the needy that every day after coming home from the dhur prayer at the mosque, he would invite any needy person home to eat lunch with. This was every single day. Up until his death at the age of 95, relatives remembered that he had continued with this habit.

My father-in-law did not like the arguing between my husband and me and counseled us to find a solution before the children suffered as a result of our fighting. He tried desperately to help us find a solution. He warned his son to allow me room to practice my religion, but it was no longer about religion anymore. I felt frustrated and desired to take a break. When I asked my husband for a separation, he agreed that perhaps it was the best thing for our marriage. You know the saying, "Absence makes the heart grow fonder." Well, not in our case. In fact, the absence made our hearts grow further apart. After the separation, we both wanted a permanent separation and agreed on a divorce. Although I desperately wanted my children to live with me, we both felt that it would be better for the children to be raised by their father. He was in a much better position, financially, to raise them and give them many comforts; something I was not prepared to give. How I longed for them every night. I moved back with my mother and continued seeing my children every weekend. My ex-husband would drop off our children on Friday afternoons and pick them up early Sunday mornings. Although this arrangement hurt, it was better than nothing.

Each night before going to bed, I would read from the Bible. When my children were visiting me, I would read them a passage regardless of whether my children understood or not. After reading a passage, one night I would seek help from Jesus, the next night from the angels, the next night from the different saints, the next night from the Virgin Mary. But one night we had no one else to ask, I had run out of Saints. So I said ' now we're going to ask God'. My son said 'Okay, now who is God?' I said 'He's the one who created you, who created me. He is forever our neighbor'. So he was pondering, he was thinking about those words. To my explanation, I rubbed my cross again. I said 'now thank God'. He looked at the cross and said 'Mamma, who is this?' I said 'This is God. He's the son of God'. He said 'You just told me a minute ago that God is forever. How come this one is dead?' I never, never in my whole life realized that fact. He asked me where does this god come from? And I said, he came from the womb of Mary, of the

Virgin Mary. He said ‘Oh, so he was born sometime before’. I said ‘well, yes’. But then he said ‘But you told me that he’s forever. He never dies and he’s never born. My son, who was now about eight, asked me directly, “Mama, why don’t you just ask God for help?“ I was surprised and stunned and remember feeling a bit shocked that he would question my religion. I told him that I also ask God. Little did I know that this son of mine would grow up to be a constant thorn in my side, always reminding me about the need to worship the One, True God. Thank God.

I ended up remarring a few years later and relocated to Australia with my new husband. My ex-husband, who had also remarried, moved his family to Saudi Arabia. I longed to see my children but eventually it was in Italy where I started a new family and became the mother to three more daughters. Still, every single night I would pray, “In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.“ The years passed quickly and busily. I was so excited one summer; my son and daughter would be coming to visit me. So many things raced through my mind. Would they be happy to see me after such a long absensce? What would we talk about? I prayed for help. All of my fears evaporated the first time I laid eyes on my children at the airport. There was an instant bond between mother and children and it was if little time had elasped. My son was the more vocal of the two. He made sure to remind me that they do not eat pork, nor could they eat foods that contained alcolhol. I told him that I remember that about his religion. I also told him that I also do not eat pork, nor drank alcolhol, a habit that remained from the time I was married to his father. As for the wine, well, I would make sure to stop cooking with it while they were home with me.

We had a beautiful summer, getting to know each other, them getting to know their new sisters, pickinicking, going on outings, swimming. I did not want it to end. But I knew that they had their life back in Saudi Arabia and they needed to get back. I asked my daughter the dreaded question of how her step-mother treated her, and I honestly felt happiness when she said she was treated like a daughter.

My children visited me together two more times after that summer. When my son turned 21, he came to live with me for 6 months. We would argue religion—boy, would we argue religion! My son and I are somewhat similar in personality, but we do have our differences – and very obvious ones at that! Whilst I’m very hot tempered in disputes, my son is a lot cooler, so he tends to maintain a sense of calm while I’m borderline crazy! Despite this clash, I believe it works in our favor in that we can find balance within our discussion. We’re very much alike in that we are loving, generous and helpful people. What I admire most about my son is his dedication to almost everything he does. He is a sweet, gentle person, but has strong ethics and aims to achieve whatever he puts his mind to, which I respect a lot. I admire his ability to keep a level head in the most stressful of situations. He’s very logical and won’t dwell too long over a problem. He just attempts to find solutions and neutralize situations as much as possible. I continued to pray that my son would find it in his heart to convert to Catholicism. I so badly wished that he would become a priest—I felt he would make a fine preacher. He was a good boy, and God-fearing at that. Good qualification for the Priesthood. When I once told him that he would make a wonderful priest, my son smiled and replied that it would be more likely that his mother would become a Muslim rather than he become a Catholic priest.

After 6 months, though, my son expressed desire to leave for the United States. He eventually settled in America and made a home in Miami, Florida. Meanwhile, I became a widow with one teenager daughter left in the house. My son really wanted for me to join him in America, so I left to the States with my 17-year-old daughter. We very much liked it in America and my daughter quickly started to make a life for herself. Nothing had changed for my son and me—we continued talking about Catholicism and Islam and neither one of us would 'give up'. Sometimes, when the subject of the Trinity came up and I could not find any answers or rebuttal to him, I would just put up my hand and walk away. I would get very angry for what I saw was his attacking my religion.

"Why can't you be like everyone else," I asked. "Other Muslims accept me and do not try to convert me." "I'm not like everyone else," he answered. "I love you. I am your son and I want you to go to Paradise." I told him that I am going to Paradise—I am a good, honest woman, who doesn't lie, steal, or cheat." My son answered, "These things are neccessary and helpful in this wordly life, however in the Quran it is stated many times that Allah does not forgive Shirk (Polytheism). The Quran says that the ONLY sin that God will not forgive is associating partners with Him, but He forgives anything else to whom He wills." He begged me to read and learn and discover Islam. Books were brought so that I might open my mind. I refused. Born a Catholic, I will die a Catholic.

For the next 10 years, I remained living near my son, his wife, and family. I desired, though, to also spend some time with my daughter, who was still living in Saudi Arabia. It wasn't easy to get a visa. My son joked that if I just accepted Islam, that would be the visa to enter Saudi Arabia; for I would then be able to get an Umrah visa. I told him sternly that I wasn't a Muslim. After much hard work and a few connections, I was given a visitor's visa to visit my daughter, who was now the mother of three children. Before leaving, my son held me in a bear hug, and told me how much he loved me, how badly he wanted Paradise for me. He then went on to say how he had everything he had wanted in this life, except for a Mother who was a Muslim. He told me that he prayed to God (Allah) every single day that He (SWT) would change my heart to accept Islam. I told him that that would never happen.

1. I visited my daughter in Saudi Arabia and fell in love with the country, the weather, and the people. I didn't want to leave after the 6 months so I requested an extension. I would hear the athan (call to prayer) 5 times a day and would see the faithful ones close their shops and walk off to prayer. Although that was very touching, I continued reading from my Bible every morning and evening and would constantly say the rosary. Not once did my daughter or any other Muslim person ever speak to me about Islam or try to get me to convert. They respected me and allowed me to practice my religion.

My son was coming to Saudi Arabia to visit me. I was so happy—I had missed him so. No sooner did he come was he again after me, talking religion and the Oneness of God. I was angry. I told him that I have been in Saudi Arabia for over one year and not once has anyone ever spoken about religion to me. And he, on his second night here, is so quick to begin the preaching. He apologized and again told me how much he wanted me to accept Islam. I again told him that I would never leave Christianity. He asked me about the Trinity and how could I believe in

something that just did not make any logical sense. He reminded me that even I had questions about this. I told him that everything does not have to make sense—you just have to have faith. He seemed like he accepted this answer and I was happy that I finally won a discussion on religion. My son then told me to explain the miracle of Jesus to him. Aha, I thought! I am finally getting somewhere. I explained the miracle birth of Jesus, the Virgin Mary, Jesus dying for our sins, God breathing His Spirit in him, Jesus as God, Jesus as the Son of God. He was quiet the entire time I was talking—no rebuttal—my son, quiet? He then quietly asked, "Mamma, if Jesus died for our sins on a Friday, and then as you say, he was resurrected three days later on a Sunday, then who ruled the world for those three days? Mamma, explain that to me?" I thought about the logic to this question and at that moment, I knew that it did not make any sense.

I said, "Jesus was the son of God. Jesus and God are one and the same. My son replied, "Cows have calves; little cows. Cats have kittens; little cats. Humans have children; little humans. When God has a son, what is he? A little God? If so, then do you have two Gods?" Then he asked, "Mama, can you ever become a God?" What a ridiculous question I told him. Humans can never be a God. (Now, I was really getting angry) He then asked, "Was Jesus a human being?" I replied, "Yes." He then said "Therefore, he could never be God." The claim that God became man is also an absurdity. It is not befitting of God to take on human characteristics because it means that the Creator has become His creation. However, the creation is a product of the creative act of the Creator. If the Creator became His creation, it would mean that the Creator created Himself, which is an obvious absurdity. To be created, He would first have to not exist, and, if He did not exist, how could He then create? Furthermore, if He were created, it would mean that He had a beginning, which also contradicts His being eternal. By definition creation is in need of a creator. For created beings to exist they must have a creator to bring them into existence.God cannot need a creator because God is the Creator. Thus, there is an obvious contradiction in terms. The claim that God became His creation implies that He would need a creator, which is a ludicrous concept. It contradicts the fundamental concept of God being uncreated, needing no creator and being the Creator. Knowing I did not have an answer to him, I replied, "Let me think about the answer."

That evening, I thought long and hard about what my son said. The idea that Jesus as the son of God did not make sense to me anymore. I also could not accept the fact as Jesus and God being one in the same. Before going to sleep that night, my son told me to pray to God before going to sleep and ask Him alone to guide me to the right path. I promised my son that I would sincerely supplicate to God for the anwer. I went to my room and read from the book my son had given me. Next, I opened the Holy Quran and began to read. It was if something had been lifted from my heart. I felt different. I saw the truth in Islam. What had I been fighting against all these years?

That night I prayed to God alone—not to Jesus, not to Mary, not to the angels or saints or holy spirit. Just to God I cried and asked for guidance. I prayed that if Islam was the right choice to please change my heart and mind. I went to sleep and the next morning I woke up and announced to my son that I was ready to accept Islam. He was astonished. We both began to cry. My daughter and granddaughter were called out and watched as I submitted, "*There is no God except Allah and Muhammad (pbuh) is His Messenger and Last Prophet*." I felt a changed woman. I was happy, as if someone had lifted a veil of darkness from my heart. Everyone who

knew me couldn’t believe that I had converted. Sometimes I couldn’t even believe it! But Islam felt so right, so peaceful, so serene!

After my son left back to the states, I learned how to recite Surah-al-Fatiha in Arabic and have since learned how to perform the prayers. I continued with life as before; except now I am a Muslim. I always loved attending family gatherings with my daughter, and social events as well. I would attend family and friends weddings, henna parties, baby showers (aqiqah) and the gatherings when someone died. About 6 months after I had converted to Islam, I was at a funeral gathering that readlly touched my heart and reinforced what a beautiful religion Islam is. A young boy had died from a sickness. As my daughter was getting ready to leave for the condolences, I asked her if she knew the family well. She answered that she did not. “Then why go?“ I asked. “Because the family is grieving, and it is my duty in Islam to go and perhaps offer any support that I can.“ I decided to dress and go with her. I went along with my daughter to pay condolences to the boy’s family and was overwhelmed at the number of people in attendance. I was surprised and touched that so many people came to give the family support. All I could think of as I saw the family grieving was what a beautiful religion Islam was that so many people felt it their responsibility to give their support. And that one event, where Muslims were showing an outpoor of sympathy is another moment that proved the beauty of Islam.

I have been a Muslim for three years now, Alhamdullilah. Since that time, I have performed Umrah twice with my son and daughter. My son, daughter and I visited the Kabaah and the Holy Prophet’s Mosque in Madinah. I just celebrated my 70th birthday Alhumdullilah. Sometimes I think back to all the hardship and heartache that I must have caused my son, but my son was extremelly happy to serve me by also being a means to bring me to Islam. He then said, that the Prophet (SAW) told a person, **“ Paradise lies under the feet of mothers".** The meaning of the Hadith is that you should serve your mother and take good care of her. It is for sure by being at my feet that there was paradise for both of us. I also wonder if my daughter would have applied a little pressure on me, I might have become a Muslim sooner. But my son reminded me that Allah is the best of planners. And it is only He (SWT) that can give a person Hidaya (Guidance). ***“ Indeed it is not such that you can guide whomever you love, but Allah guides whomever He wills. “*** (Quran 28:56). The best thing that Allah had honored me is by guiding me to the path of Islam and making me a Muslim, and inshAllah enter together with my son in Paradise. **“**. *Ameen*

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